

Dhrtarāṣṭra's widowed daughters-in-law (i.e. *kṣatriya* women) are described as having dishevelled hair (*asīmantaśiroruhā[h]*, lit. 'without a parting'; Sdhp.47[2]r.8–10 < Mbh.XV.32.15).

In contexts other than widowhood (e.g. for certain *prāyaścitta* rituals when performed by unmarried girls or women whose husbands are alive), the phrase 'shaving the head' (*śirasō muṇḍanam*) is taken to mean simply cutting two fingers' breadth (*aṅgulidvayam*) off the ends of the hair (Sdhp.47[2]v.1–3; cf. Bhardwaj 1983:154). In fact, as Tryambaka explains, the four main prohibitions relating to the performance by women of certain aspects (or component elements; *aṅga*) of *vratas* include a prohibition on shaving the head (*keśavapanam*). The other three concern sleeping or staying far from home (*dūre śayanāsanam*); staying in the cow-pen at night, or following cows about in dangerous places during the day; and wearing deerskins (*ajinam vās[ah]*; Sdhp.47[2]v.6–8).

Tryambaka concludes that three kinds of women merit the name of *pativrātā*: the wife who dies before her husband (*bhartuh pūrvam mṛtā*) and patiently waits for him to join her; the wife who follows her husband onto the funeral pyre (*bhartrā sahānugatā*), exemplified by Mādri; and the wife who after her husband's death lives an ascetic and celibate life for the rest of her days (*yāvajjīvam brahmacyādīnā yuktā*), exemplified by Kuntī. The first kind of wife is the auspicious ideal. But if the husband dies first, inauspiciousness and misfortune may be offset by either of the two options open to his widow. While the second alternative is deemed safer than the third—given the nature of women and the difficulties of leading a truly ascetic life—all three earn the ultimate reward of reaching the same heaven as their husbands (*patisālokyam*; Sdhp.48r.9–48v.6).

V. Tryambaka's Conclusion: Obedient Service to one's Husband is the Primary Religious Duty (of a wife)

(*patiśuśrūṣaṇam mukhyo dharmah*;
Sdhp.48v. 7–88r. 1).

Tryambaka returns to the point at which he began. 'Obedient service to one's husband (*bhartrśuśrūṣaṇam*, Sdhp.1v.2; *patiśuśrūṣaṇam*, Sdhp.48v.7) is the primary religious duty enjoined by sacred tradition for women' (see section I, introductory verse 1, p.29, note 2). In this section, he defines 'obedient service to one's husband' in three ways. First, a wife should serve her husband 'without regard for her own life' (*prāṇānām avigānanayā*). Secondly, she should accept whatever her husband does 'even the sale of herself' (*ātma-vikraya*). Thirdly, she should obey his will 'even when it conflicts with other religious duties' (*itaradharmopamardena*).¹ Most of the rest of the treatise is taken up with some short and some extremely long examples of these three aspects of *patiśuśrūṣaṇam*. I shall deal briefly with the most important ones.

As suggested in my introduction, this unwieldy section was probably intended for the ears of the young daughters-in-law of the household (cf. pp.9–10). This would explain the long quotations from well-known stories and the marked lack of any real argument. It was presumably hoped that such lengthy retellings of favourite and traditional tales would inspire impressionable young women to conform to the highest ideals of *strīdharmā*.

Without regard for her own life (*prāṇānām avigānanayā*;
Sdhp.48v.8–55r.8)

When Sītā sees Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa being carried off by a powerful demon, she begs the demon to release them and take her instead

1. *patiśuśrūṣaṇam tu prāṇānām avigānanayā kartavyatvāt[] bhartrkṛt-ātma-vikrayasyāṅgikartavyatvāt[] itaradharmopamardena ca kartavyatvāt[] patiśuśrūṣaṇam mukhyo dharmah* // Sdhp.48v.7–8 with insert.

(Sdhp.48v.8–49r. 1; Sdhp.48v.9–10 < Rām.III.4.3b).

In the story of the brahmin whose life is forfeit to the crane-demon, Baka, the brahmin's wife begs to be allowed to go in his place (Sdhp.49r.1–3). As she explains, 'this is the supreme and everlasting duty of women in this world: (the wife) should pursue what is good for her husband even (at the cost of) abandoning her life.'²

The story of the female pigeon caught by a cruel and wicked bird-catcher is told at surprising length (Sdhp.49r.3–55r.8; Sdhp.49r.5–55r.8 < Mbh.XII.141.1–145.18, with few omissions, some variants).

It includes several *śloka*s on the virtues of the *pativratā*. For example, for a man who has fallen on bad times (*kṛcchragatasya*), there is no friend (*mitram*), no medicine (*bheṣajam*), no relation (*bandhuh*) and no goal (or refuge; *gatiḥ*) like a wife (Sdhp.51r.3–4 < Mbh.XII.142.9b–10a, variant).

After a fierce storm in the forest, the bird-catcher puts the female pigeon in a cage, and then by chance takes refuge at the foot of the tree in which the pigeons live (*śaranam yāmi yāny asmin daivatāni*; Sdhp.50v.2–3 < Mbh.XII.141.26b). Despite her predicament, the female pigeon entreats her husband to pursue the householder's religious duty of offering hospitality to the guest (i.e. the bird-catcher who has come to their tree). The pigeon is inspired by his wife's words. He brings fire and fuel to keep the man warm and then, since he has no store of food to offer, he enters the fire himself in order to provide the guest with a meal. Impressed, the bird-catcher resolves to abandon his wicked ways, become an ascetic, and embark upon the great journey unto death (*mahāprasthāna*; i.e. a *maranāntikaprayāścitta*, cf. section IV, pp.295–7). The pigeon's wife is released from her cage. At once, she declares the futility of remaining alive without her husband and throws herself into the same fire. A heavenly vehicle (*vimāna*) takes both her and her husband to heaven. Eventually, the bird-catcher follows their example: he deliberately enters a forest fire, dies, and ascends to heaven.

In the *Mahābhārata*, the story is told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma to

2. *etad dhi paramam nāryāḥ kāryam loke sanātanam / prāṇān api parityajya yad bhartrhitam ācaret* // Sdhp.49r.2–3 < Mbh.I.146.4.

demonstrate the householder's supreme duty to offer hospitality to anyone who asks for it (cf. section IIC, pp.183–210; and, incidentally, to describe the heavenly rewards awaiting the devoted wife who dies on her husband's funeral pyre (cf. section IV, pp.293–5). Tryambaka uses it to illustrate the first subpoint of his conclusion: that the good wife should serve her husband without concern for her own safety.

Accepting (even) her husband's sale of her (*bhartṛkṛtātmavikrayāṅgikārah*; Sdhp.55r.8, *sodhapatra* < Mārṅ.P.VIII.51b–53, 55b, 57, 59–60, 63–6; with variants)

The inserted passage is an extract from the story of Hāriscandra as told in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. When King Hāriscandra inadvertently crosses a brahmin ascetic, the ascetic demands not only his kingdom and property but, over and above that, a sacrificial fee. In order to pay the latter, Hāriscandra auctions his wife as a slave in the public market. An old brahmin buys her and drags her off by the hair (*keśeṣv athādāya nṛpapatnīm akarṣata*). Instead of complaining, the queen begs the old man to buy her young son as well so that she can continue to take care of him.

In the context of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, this story demonstrates that a man should put his religious duty to brahmins even above his affection for his wife and child. An extremely popular Buddhist

3. In MS T₁, the story of the pigeons and the bird-catcher ends with an omission mark and the word *sodhapatra* in the margin (... iti // *adhyāyah* // // Sdhp.55r.8). The text itself continues with the example of the third aspect of *pativratā* (*itaradharmopamardenāpi* ... // Sdhp.55r.8). The *sodhapatra* cited is now missing but it is clear from MS T₂ that it was inserted between folios 55 and 56. For the scribe of T₂ copies T₁ as it stands (... iti // *adhyāyah* // *sodhapatra* // // *itaradharmopamardenāpi* ... //). On reaching the end of T₁ folio 55v, he copies the *sodhapatra* without a break: *pādyam ācāmanīyam vai dadau bhartus tadāsanam* // *bhartṛkṛtātmavikrayāṅgikāro* ... // T₁ 55v.10/T₂ 42v.11). At the end of the Hāriscandra story (... *sahakastham abandhayat* // *iti* //), he drops back into the pigeon story in the middle of a line: *syuḥ sarvadevatāḥ* ... // (cf. T₁ 54r.2). He then tells both the rest of that story and the entire Hāriscandra episode (T₁ 44r.7–44v.5) again. The Mysore MS (M) makes no such mistake: after the pigeon story, it tells the story of Hāriscandra, thus incorporating the *sodhapatra* of T₁ as intended. Following MS M and PT, I have assumed the same.

version of this idea may be found in the story of Prince Vessantara who gives away all he has, including his wife, Maddī, and their two children. We are told that Maddī accepted her treatment without resentment or question, saying that her lord and master could give her away, sell or even kill her if he chose (cf. Cone and Gombrich 1977:75, § 570). Tryambaka's point is much the same: even in such extreme circumstances, the ideal wife thinks only of her duty to her husband and son.

Even if it conflicts with other duties (itaradharmopamardenāpi; Sdhp.55r.8–66v.3)

Tryambaka's main example tells the story of the ascetic Kauśika and the brahmin women (Sdhp.55r.11–58r.2 < Mbh.III.197.1–44; with variants, and some additional *śloka*s to be found in the footnotes of the critical edition).

While Kauśika is sitting at the foot of a tree reciting the Vedas, a female crane (or, more probably, egret; *balākā*) in the branches above inadvertently excretes on him. Kauśika is so angry that his thoughts alone cause the bird to drop dead. Filled with remorse, Kauśika then goes to a brahmin household to beg for food. The woman of the house welcomes him and is about to give him alms when her husband appears. She at once abandons Kauśika (*brāhmaṇam vyapahāya tam*) and attends to her husband, washing his feet, bringing him a seat, offering him food and drink, and so on. By the time she remembers to bring Kauśika his food, the ascetic is furious.

First, she placates him, explaining that her husband is her greatest god (*bhartā me daivatam mahat*). When Kauśika persists in his rage that she should worship her husband before the brahmin guest, she informs him briskly that she is no mere crane (*nāhaṁ balākā*; part of a *śloka* given only as a variant in the Mbh. crit. edn.), unaware of the importance of brahmins. But she has chosen the religious path of devoted service to her husband (*patiśuśrūṣayā dharmam*). As a result, she regards her husband as 'the supreme god among all gods', whose law she must fulfil without question.⁴ It is through the merit she has gained thereby (*śuśrūṣayā phalam paśya*) that she knows all about the incident with the crane. She proceeds to reprove the

4. *daivatesv api sarveṣu bhartā me daivatam param | aviśeṣeṇa tasyāham kuryām dharmam dvijottama* // Sdhp.57r.2–3 < Mbh.III.197.29.

ascetic for failing to control his anger as a true brahmin should. Concluding that he does not really understand what religious duty means (*na . . . dharmam vatsīti me mañih*), she sends him to a hunter (*vyādha*) in Mithila for further instruction. Suitably chastened, Kauśika obeys.

The story demonstrates Tryambaka's point that, if two duties conflict, service to one's husband comes first.

In order to stress that no other religious obligation may supersede the wife's primary duty towards her husband, Tryambaka also gives a number of separate quotations taken from a variety of sources (epic, *purāṇa* and *dharmasāstra*; Sdhp.58r.2–60r.3). Most of these reiterate or support points raised elsewhere.

For example, 'there is no separate religious duty, vow or fast' (*prthagdharmo na vratam nāpy uposaṇam*) for a woman other than her devotion to her husband (Sdhp.55r.8–9, 58v.2–3, 58v.5–6; for a discussion of this issue, see sections I (pp.29–43) and IIB (pp.107–15). The husband is her god and her guru (*bhartā devo gurur bhartā*), religious duty, place of pilgrimage and vow all in one (*dharmatīrthavratāni ca*); hence she should abandon all else and cleave only to him (Sdhp.55r.9–10). Just as *sūdras* should serve the higher *varṇas*, so women should serve their own husbands; and they should never engage in *japa* recitation, austerities, oblations, religious donations, vows nor sacrificial ritual as long as their husbands live (Sdhp.58r.3–5; see section IV, note 8). The auspicious epithets 'she who is devoted to religious duty' (*dharmaparamā*) and 'she who participates in her (husband's) religious duty' (*dharmabhāginī*) are applied to the ideal wife who 'regards her husband as a god' (*devavat . . . pra-paśyati*; Sdhp.59r.4–5); and so on.

Tryambaka concludes that, through devoted service to her husband, the good wife attains the merit of every religious act that he performs (*tenaiva bhartṛkṛtasarvadharmaphalāvaptiḥ*; Sdhp.59v.2ff.).

Tryambaka in fact goes even further: if her husband requires it, a woman should do even what is normally considered wrong (*tadā-jñayā akāryam api kartavyam*). This point is also made earlier in a passage attributed to Viṇṇāneśvara (Sdhp.60r.1). Tryambaka's evidence is drawn from two well-known stories in the *Mahābhārata*. First, he quotes at length from the conversation between Pāṇḍu and

Kuntī on the subject of *niyoga* (Sdhp.60r.4-61v.6 < Mbh.I.111.30b-6; 112.3-5, 6b-c, 11-12a, 13-17; 19-28, 30-1; with variants).

While hunting in the forest, Pāṇḍu shoots a deer that turns out to be an ascetic. Since he has been killed in the act of mating, the ascetic curses Pāṇḍu that he too will die in the sexual act. Now unable to father children himself, Pāṇḍu asks Kuntī to find someone to act for him by the ancient custom of *niyoga* (see section IV, pp.300-2).

Tryambaka presents Pāṇḍu's arguments in favour of the practice but omits Kuntī's against it. In order to persuade her to his point of view, Pāṇḍu tells her of several virtuous women who have produced sons in this way: Śāradanḍāyini (Sdhp.60r.8-60v.2), Madayanti (Sdhp. 61r.6-7) and his own mother (Sdhp.61r.8). He also describes how Śvetaketu made it a sin on a par with foetus-murder (*bhrūṇa-hatyākṛtam pāpam*) for a woman either to sleep with any man other than her husband or to refuse to conceive a child when appointed to do so by her husband (*patyā niyuktā*; Sdhp.61r.2-5). The important point, however, is not that *niyoga* may be within the law (in fact, in section IV, Tryambaka rules that it is not), but that the husband desires it. Twice Tryambaka repeats Pāṇḍu's crucial statement that 'those who know the law know that whatever a husband tells his wife (to do), whether it is lawful or even unlawful, she should do it.'⁵

Tryambaka's second illustration demonstrates that when a wife obeys her husband—even if that means doing something that is normally considered wrong (*akāryakaraṇe 'pi*)—not only is no sin at all incurred (*na kevalam doṣābhāvaḥ*) but, on the contrary, the highest heaven is attained (*kiṃ tūttamalokaprāptiś ca*; Sdhp.61v.6-7, with insert). The story of Sudarśana is told here in full (Sdhp.61v.7-66v.1 < Mbh. XIII.2.1-95; with few omissions, some variants).

In the context of the *Mahābhārata*, as Tryambaka explains, the story is told by Bhīṣma when Yudhiṣṭhira asks him if any householder has ever conquered Death merely by practising his religious

5. *bhartā bhāryām rājaputri dharmyam vādarmyam eva yā / yad brūyāt tat tathā kāryam iti dharmavido viduḥ* // Sdhp.60r.4-5; 61v.1-2 < Mbh.I.113.27.

duty (*dharmam āśritya*). The lengthy preamble to the story explains how the beautiful Princess Sudarśanā, born into a noble and royal family, marries Agni and gives birth to Sudarśana. When Sudarśana marries Oghavatī, he takes a vow that he will conquer Death simply by being a householder (*grhasṭhaś cāvajesyāmi mṛtyum*; Sdhp.63v.7 < Mbh.XIII.2.40). He tells his wife that there is no more important religious duty for the householder than offering hospitality to guests (Sdhp.63v.10-64r.1; cf. section IIC, pp.183-210). Therefore, whether or not he is there himself, she should never refuse a guest anything (*atitheḥ pratikūlam te na kartavyam kathamecana*), even if it means offering herself (*apy ātmanah pradānena*; Sdhp.63v.8-10 < Mbh.XIII.2.41-2).

One day, while Sudarśana is out collecting firewood, a brahmin comes to Oghavatī and asks for hospitality. She greets him in the usual way, then asks what he wants. Despite her attempts to dissuade him, the brahmin wants only herself (*tvayā mamārthaḥ . . . // pradānenātmano . . . kartum arhasi me priyam*; Sdhp.64r.8-10 < Mbh.XIII.2.52-3). Remembering her husband's instructions, Oghavatī agrees. Meanwhile Sudarśana returns from the forest (and calls out to his wife; omitted). Since she is still in the brahmin's arms (lit. 'touched' by them; *karābhyām tena vipreṇa spr̥ṣṭā*), she does not reply: considering herself polluted (literally 'left-over'), she is ashamed (*ucchiṣṭā[s]mīti manvānā lajjitā*; Sdhp.64v.4-5 < Mbh.XIII.2.60; for a discussion of *ucchiṣṭa* in the context of 'left-over' food, see section IIC, pp.221-7). The brahmin calls out to Sudarśana to explain. While Death waits poised with his iron club, Sudarśana throws aside anger and jealousy, bids the brahmin welcome, and calls the gods to witness the truth of his vow to offer everything he has to the guest (*. . . tena satyena . . .*; Sdhp.64v.7-65r.9 < Mbh.XIII.2.63-74; cf. Brown 1978). The air resounds with divine confirmations; Death is conquered; and the brahmin turns out to be god Dharma in disguise. Even Oghavatī's chastity is restored by Dharma's assurance that she has been perfectly protected by the combination of Sudarśana's virtues and the virtues of a woman who has truly taken the vow of her husband (*rakṣitā tvadgunair eṣā pativratagunais tathā*; Sdhp.65v.4-6 < Mbh.XIII.2.80-1). Her reward, as we should have guessed from her name, is that half of her will become immortalized as a sacred river (traditionally the supreme reward for virtuous women), while the other half will attain with her husband all the heavenly worlds normally

acquired by austerities (Sdhp.65v.6-10 < Mbh.XIII.2.82-5).

In the context of the *Mahābhārata*, the story demonstrates the importance for the householder of honouring the guest (cf. section IIC, pp.183-210). For Tryambaka, it illustrates the lengths to which the good wife should go in her determination to carry out not her own desire but her husband's command (*tadājñāyā tu kartavyam akāryam api necchayā*; Sdhp.66v.1-2).

The emphasis on wifely obedience, so graphically illustrated in the last two stories quoted, evidently suggested a potential problem to Tryambaka (Sdhp. 66v.3-67[1]v.10). As he himself explains, he had earlier (*pūrvam*) declared that the foremost religious duty for women was 'service to one's husband' (*patiśūśrūṣaṇa*; see note1). In the story of Sudarsana, however, 'the most powerful thing is said to be obedience to the (husband's) command' (*ājñākaraṇasya prābalyam pratipadyate*; Sdhp.66v.4). Is there a contradiction (*virodha*) here?

Tryambaka explains at some length that there is not. For 'service' comprises 'every action that gives pleasure to one's husband' (*tatprītyutpādanavyāpārah sarvo 'pi śūśrūṣaiva*). Since obedience also gives him pleasure (*ājñākaraṇam api prītyutpādanatvāt*), it is included in the general term 'service' (*śūśrūṣāntargatam eva*; Sdhp. 66v.9-10). Tryambaka argues that the writers of *dharmaśāstra* (*śāstrakāra*) use the word *śūśrūṣā* in this sense to cover all actions that give pleasure to someone to whom one owes respect (*sarvam api gurujanaprītikaram karma*; Sdhp.67[1]r.1-2). With reference to the son's relationship with his mother (cf. Āp.1.10.28.9), the sacrificer is referred to as his mother's son in order to give her pleasure; and that is why Haradatta calls it *śūśrūṣā* (Sdhp.67[1]r.9-67[1]v.1, with insert; cf. Har. on Āp.1.10.28.9-10). Similarly, the 'service' owed by the student to his teacher includes both obeying his commands and administering to his physical needs. Traditionally, however, only three things are specified as the religious duty of the student: service to the teacher, begging for alms, and lighting the sacred fire (*ācāryaśūśrūṣā bhikṣācāraṇam agnīndhanam*; Sdhp.67[1]v.4-6). Since 'obedience' (*ājñākaraṇa*) is included in 'service', it is not mentioned separately. Why then does Tryambaka discuss it separately? He does so merely to draw attention to a part of the whole, in accordance with the traditional ruling for pleonastic expressions (*gobalivardhananyāyena*; Sdhp.67[1]v.9-10; cf. Medh. on Manu VIII.28). Tryambaka's analogy between the student's behaviour

towards his teacher and that of the wife towards her husband reinforces earlier comments to this effect (see sections I, pp.34-9; IIC, pp.168-3, 221-7, etc.).

To prove his point, Tryambaka relates the story of Svāhā and Arundhatī (Sdhp.67[2]r.9-69r.4; Sdhp.67[2]v.1-69r.2 < Mbh.III.213.40-214.4a, 5-14; with variants). It is often said that a woman who completely (*akhilam*) fulfils her religious duty towards her husband 'will be glorified in heaven as an Arundhatī among women' (*arundhatīva nārīnām svargaloke mahiyate*, Sdhp. 67[2]r.9-10; e.g. section IV, p.43, note 43). Tryambaka explains that this is because Arundhatī 'served' her husband with great fervour (*patiśūśrūṣanā-tīṣayena*).

The story, as told by Tryambaka, runs as follows. During a sacrifice, Agni saw the wives of the seven sages and was overwhelmed by lust (*kāmaśaṣam yayau*). Realizing this, Agni's wife Svāhā resolved to take the form of each of the seven wives in turn in order to make love with Agni herself. With six of the wives she was successful, but she was unable to assume the 'divine form' of Arundhatī 'because of the splendour of her austerities and (the supernatural power arising from) her devoted service to her husband' (*tasyās tapahprabhāvenā bhartrīṣanena ca*; Sdhp.69r.1-2 < Mbh.III.214.14). Van Buitenen's translation of *śūśrūṣaṇa* as 'faithfulness' is clearly inadequate here. For the 'fervent service' envisaged by Tryambaka assumes his own broad definition of *śūśrūṣaṇa*; that is, it includes 'every action that brings pleasure to one's husband.'

Reminding us that women have no means of atonement (literally, 'austerity'; *tapas*) other than devotedly serving their husbands (cf. section IV, pp.295-7), Tryambaka relates in full the story of Sāvitṛī, the most renowned and best-loved *pativrata* of all (Sdhp.69r.5-86v.4; Sdhp.69r.6-86v.3 < Mbh.III.277.1-283.16, with variants, and additional *ślokas* to be found in the footnotes of the critical edition).

In the context of the *Mahābhārata*, Mārkaṇḍeya tells the story to Yudhiṣṭhira when the latter asks him if there has ever been a wife as devoted as Draupadī. At the end of the story, Mārkaṇḍeya reassures Yudhiṣṭhira that Draupadī, like Sāvitṛī, will save her husband. The story itself is so well known that the briefest summary is sufficient here.

Sāvitṛī is born to King Aśvapati of the Madra people, by the grace of the goddess Sāvitṛī, after he has offered oblations with the

sāvitṛī formula regularly for eighteen years. When she grows up, since no man asks to marry her, Aśvapati sends her on a pilgrimage to find a husband. She chooses Satyavat, who lives with his mother and blind father in exile in the forest. Although *Sāvitṛī* learns that he is doomed to die within a year, she marries him anyway and joins the exiled family. As the day of his death approaches, *Sāvitṛī* undertakes the severe *tapas* of standing day and night for three days. On the fourth day, she accompanies her husband into the forest. When Satyavat collapses and Yama comes to take his soul away, *Sāvitṛī* follows, answering Yama with such meek wisdom that he gives her three wishes (always excluding Satyavat's life). She asks first, that her father-in-law will regain his sight; secondly, that he will regain his kingdom; and thirdly, that her own father will have a hundred sons. Given a fourth wish, she asks that she and Satyavat will also have a hundred sons. The fifth wish is given without qualification: Satyavat is freed.

It is interesting to note that the story of *Sāvitṛī* seems to condone several things that Tryambaka has explicitly and repeatedly condemned in his treatise. For example, *Sāvitṛī* is evidently not married before puberty since she is adult enough to embark on a pilgrimage alone (cf. the discussion of *nagnikā*, section IIA, pp.86–8). According to Tryambaka, the pilgrimage itself is prohibited (see sections IIB, pp.132–41, and IV, p.275, note 7). So, one assumes, is the stubbornness with which she refuses to accept her father's initial decision that she should not marry Satyavat (see section IV, p.276, note 9). She undertakes a three-day 'vow' (*vrata*) that involves severe austerities (*tapas*) when both vows and austerities are forbidden to her (cf. section IV, pp.275–6, notes 7–8). Instead of submitting to her father-in-law (cf. section IIC, pp.156–7), she ignores his advice to stop her vow. She even answers back to Death, refusing (albeit humbly) to give in to his decree. Yet, by virtue of her devotion to her husband, *Sāvitṛī* is praised throughout India even today as the perfect *pativrata*. Tryambaka would presumably argue that this merely demonstrates that devotion to one's husband supersedes all other obligations (see above).

Tryambaka's summary (Sdhp.86v.4–88r.1)

The husband is thus to be propitiated (*saṁtoṣanīyah*), comprising a variety of meanings: giving pleasure, making happy, pacifying,

appeasing, worshipping, etc.) (by the wife as follows): by observing the rules of purification; by attending to the fire ritual; by paying homage to guests; by taking care of household duties; by keeping close watch over the household (accounts), both income and expenditure; by attending to her husband's bodily comfort; by serving food to her husband's dependants, etc.; by eating the sanctified remains (*prasāda*) of (the food offered to) him herself; by love-making and so on at night; by avoiding both those things which are forbidden to her and those which her husband does not like; by putting into practice both those things which are prescribed and those which her husband likes; by adorning herself (*pratikarmaṇā*; or perhaps "keeping everything tidy"); by driving away her husband's fatigue; by putting the religious rulings relating to the body into practice whenever they are appropriate, according to the law; by following her husband (into the fire when he dies); (or, alternatively,) after her husband's death, by observing (the appropriate) restrictions such as celibacy (*brahmacaryādi*?) for as long as she lives; by obedient (or devoted) service to her husband; and by doing what he says. Propitiating him in this way is said to constitute true 'service' to one's husband.⁶

Two points may be noted here. First, despite the rulings that prohibit *sahagamana* in the *kali* age (see section IV, pp.295–7), Tryambaka has felt it appropriate to include the practice here. Similarly, despite his own evident approval of *sahagamana* (see section IV, pp.293–5), he has found it necessary to offer the alternative of widowhood as well (see section IV, p.304).

Secondly, Tryambaka continues—even in so brief a final summary—to give greater weight to the husband's opinions and demands than to any independent formulation of the law by *dharmaśāstra*. For example, the wife is required to avoid both 'those things

6. *evam śaucācārair agnisūśrūṣayātīthipūjanena gṛhakṛtyavicānenāyavyaya-kutumbasamrakṣaṇavicāreṇa bhartuḥ śarīrasūśrūṣayā bhartur āśritādinām cānnapradāneṇa svayaṁ tatprasādagrahaṇeṇa rātrau ratyādinā svaṇiṣid-dhānām bhartur apriyasya ca varjanenā vihitānām bhartur yat priyam tasya cānuṣṭhāneṇa pratikarmaṇā bhartuḥ śramāpanodanena tattatkāle prāptānām śarīradharmānām yathāvidhy anuṣṭhāneṇa bhartranugamanenā bhartur anantaram yāvajjīvabrahmacaryādiniyamaparipālanena patiśūśrūṣayā tadvacana-karmaṇa ca patiḥ saṁtoṣanīyah // evaṁ saṁtoṣanam eva patiśūśrūṣanam ity ucyate // Sdhp.86v.4–87r.2.*

that are forbidden to her' and 'those which her husband does not like'. Similarly, she should do both 'those things that are prescribed' and 'those which her husband likes'. It is clear from the tone used and the examples given throughout section V that, in each case, the latter requirement is the stronger. Thus she should follow the detailed rules of *dharmaśāstra* unless and until her husband commands her otherwise. As soon as there is any conflict, however, she should simply do as he requires. It is fitting, therefore, that Tryambaka ends his summary with what are for him the two most important rulings for the ideal wife: she should offer her husband 'obedient and devoted service' (with a marked stress on 'obedience', according to Tryambaka's own definition; see above, pp.310–12; and she should do what he says. For this is indeed true 'service'.

This summary is followed by a number of well-known *śloka*s in hyperbolic praise of the wife who manages to behave as she should. For example, such a woman obtains fame in this world and the same heaven as her husband in the next (*patiloka*), and 'there is no higher goal than that' (*cānuttamām gatim*; Sdhp.87r.6). She 'ascends to heaven via the staircase of service to her husband' (*sā bhartr-śuśrūṣāsopānasvargatīm gatā*; Sdhp.87v.3). 'Seated in an aerial chariot' (*vimānasthā*; cf. above, p.306), she is praised by the gods (Sdhp.87v.4). Wherever her foot touches the ground, the earth is purified (Sdhp.87v.4–5). Though afraid of her (*bibhyat*), the sun, moon, wind and waters deliberately touch her in order to purify themselves (Sdhp.87v.5–6). For her touch is as cleansing and auspicious as a dip in the sacred Ganges (*gaṅgāvagāha*; Sdhp.87v.7–8). 'As a result of the merit obtained by the devoted wife, three sets of three (ancestors) enjoy the pleasures of heaven: three in her father's line, three in her mother's, and three in her husband's too.'⁷

Concluding verses and colophon (Sdhp.88r.1–8)

'In this way, having (first) shuffled (lit. 'churned'; *vilodya*) the various pronouncements from the *smṛtis* and the *purāṇas* together, and (from them) collected the religious duties relating to women — some of them supplied here and there with reasoned pros and cons

7. skānde // Sdhp.87v.4. *pitṛvaṁśyā mātṛvaṁśyāḥ pativamśyās trayas trayah | pativratāyāḥ punyena svargasaukhyāni bhuñjate* // Sdhp.87v.9–88r.1 (Skānda) < Sk.P.III.2.7.58.

(*vyavasthā*) — the wise Tryambakayajvan has, at his mother's command (*mātrājñayā*), recounted them once again in their proper order in this work. By listening to them, may all women (learn to) apply their minds always to (their) religious duty!⁸

'These religious rulings relating to women, which I have heard one by one in *śruti* [*smṛti*] and *purāṇa*, I have gathered together from here and there to create (this work) in order to make things easier for the doe-eyed ones (*mṛgadṛśām*; i.e. women). This work of mine is strung together like a necklace out of brilliant pearls accepted (only) after they have been examined from all sides. May it create supreme delight for the mother of the worlds (Pārvatī)!⁹

(Colophon:) 'This Guide to the Religious Duties of Women (*strīdharmapaddhati*) was composed by Tryambakayajvan out of affection for his teacher Yajñeśa, and in order to please Nṛsiṃha. May it be (taken as) an offering to Lord Kṛṣṇa!¹⁰

Several points may be noted here. Tryambaka's allusion to 'his mother's command' in the first concluding verse recalls a parallel reference in his introductory verses (see section I, introductory verse 3, p.32, note 6). Similarly, his dedication to the goddess Pārvatī in the second concluding verse recalls the more detailed references to her in those same opening verses (see section I, introductory verses 1 and 2, pp.29–32, notes 2 and 4). Thirdly, as indicated in my introduction, Yajñeśa is also the *guru* of the author of the *Dharmākūta*; a fact that suggests that Tryambaka and the pandit-minister Tryambakarāyamakhin are indeed the same individual (see pp.10–13). Finally, the reference to Nṛsiṃha may be an allusion to Tryambaka's elder brother who was renowned as a minister and patron of scholars in his own right (see pp.16–19).

8. *itthaṁ tryambakayajvanā smṛtipurāṇoktīr vilodyākhilāḥ | dharmāḥ | strīviśayāḥ punaḥ katipaye tattadvyavasthānvitāḥ || saṁgrhyātra kṛtau kramena kathitā mātṛājñayā dhimatā / tān ākārṇya sadā striyaś ca sakalā dharmamātīm tanvātām || 1 ||* Sdhp.88r.1–4.

9. *dharmāḥ strīviśayāḥ | śrutiḥ | smṛtiḥ | purāṇesu śrūtā ye prthak / tān saṁgrhya tatas tato mṛgadṛśām saukaryahetoḥ kṛtā || seyaṁ matkṛtīr || jñvalair maṇigāṇair viśvak parikṣyāhṛtāḥ | māleṣa grathitā tanotu jagatām mātuh pramodaṁ param || 2 ||* Sdhp.88r.4–7.

10. *guruyañeśakṛpāyā śrīmāḥ | tryambakayajvanā | prīyaye śrīnṛsiṃhasya kṛtā strīdharmapaddhatīḥ || 3 || cha || cha || śrīkṛṣṇārpanam astu || cha ||* Sdhp.88r.7–8. Cf. p. 12, note 4.

Conclusion

I

One might reasonably expect that a text, or indeed a book, on the religious role of women would give considerable space to a discussion of the various aspects of the ascetic or monastic life: what sects were considered acceptable for women; the reason for opting for a life of renunciation; when and how a woman might do this; ceremonies of initiation; the signs and symbols of a woman's new status; the expectations, duties and privileges that go with it; and so on. This is perhaps the most glaring omission in Tryambaka's treatise, and therefore also in this book. For Tryambaka does not allow women the option of renunciation at all.

This is not to say that the option did not exist. We have only to look at the epics for frequent references to female ascetics. The work of anthropologists and historians provides ample evidence both of current trends in female asceticism and of their antecedents. Research topics include: women ascetics in traditional and modern Hinduism (Ojha 1981, 1984; King 1984); women saints of history and legend (Alston 1980; Hardy 1980; Abbott 1929; Ramanujan 1979: 129ff.; 1982); female ascetics today in Benares (Denton) and Nepal (Caplan 1973); Jaina nuns and laywomen in Rajasthan (Reynell 1985); and a variety of studies on Buddhist laywomen and nuns (Horner 1975; Paul 1979; Flak 1980; Nissan 1984; etc.). Even the *Yatidharmaprakāśa*, a treatise on renunciation from within the discipline of *dharmaśāstra*, allows (albeit without enthusiasm) that women are entitled to become renunciators (Yatidh. 61.39-41; Mit.on Yājñ.III.58; Olivelle 1977:33-4, 175).

As Olivelle points out, in order to disentangle this complex question of the renunciation of women, it is essential to distinguish between three separate issues: the legitimacy of the practice in terms of *dharmaśāstra*; its legality in the eyes of the law; and its historicity (1984:113-15). Obviously, the *Strīdharmapaddhati* does not do this. Tryambaka's concern is solely with the legitimacy of the practice in the eyes of *dharma*. For both arguments and evidence are drawn from *dharmaśāstra* rather than from life. It is thus not so

much his rejection of female renunciation that is of interest to us today as the reasoning behind it.

For any mention—however rare and perfunctory—of women renunciators, or female renunciation in general, is redolent with negative associations, together with the insistence that the good Hindu wife should have nothing to do with them or it. For example, Tryambaka informs us that the orthodox wife should never associate with 'female renunciators' (*pravrajitā*) or 'female religious mendicants' (*śramanā*), bracketing them with other 'bad influences' such as courtesans, women gamblers, women who meet lovers in secret, intellectual women (*haitukī*), and so on (see section HC, pp.171-2). In the section on things to be avoided (IV, pp.274-6), renunciation (*pravrajyā*) is one of the six things that cause women and *sūdras* to fall into hell. In a quotation from the *Mahābhārata*, Śāṇḍilī stresses that she earned her place in heaven by being a good wife and not by wearing the ochre robes of the renunciate, the bark garments of the hermit, the matted locks of the ascetic, or by shaving her head as some renunciators do (section IV, pp.282-3, note 26). In the story of Aṣṭāvakra and the old female ascetic to whom the young man is sent for instruction, the emphasis rests not on her asceticism nor on her spiritual achievements, but on the fact that—even in old age, even after years of renunciation—she has not managed to subdue the rampant sexuality of her innate female nature (see section III, pp.268, 271).

The last example provides the clue to Tryambaka's attitude. First, his references to female renunciation make it clear that he was fully aware of the possibility of women following such a path. Indeed, there were almost certainly more women renunciators in his day than there are today; and no doubt they earned as much genuine respect from the majority of Hindus then as their counterparts do today (cf. Denton: ch.4). For Tryambaka, however, the point is not whether women could become renunciators, but whether—according to *dharmaśāstra*—they should. The answer is clearly that they should not. In part, this is due to the same set of values applied routinely by *dharmaśāstra* to men; that is, the conviction that, of all the *āśramas* open to the male, that of the householder is best (see p.44-5). In part, however, the reasoning is peculiar to the case of women. For it rests heavily on Tryambaka's understanding of female nature (*strīsvabhāva*).

As I explained in section III, Tryambaka assumes the orthodox

view of *svadharma*: good conduct produces auspicious births, evil conduct inferior births; and good conduct is defined as that appropriate to one's birth and station in this life. Birth as a woman is itself a mark of bad conduct in a previous life; the assiduous performance of the conduct appropriate to women (*strīdharma*) the only way to erase it. Since women are denied access to Vedic education, they cannot purify themselves with mantras or offer sacrifice in their own right (see sections I, pp.34-9, and IIB, pp.107-15). According to the rigid orthodoxy professed by such as Tryambaka, they cannot perform any religious act independently of their husbands; they cannot even worship any god other than their husbands. Their only hope for salvation, and thus their only worthwhile goal, is the pursuit of *strīdharma*. The two poles of a woman's existence are thus represented by two radically opposed concepts: the essentially wicked nature of women as evidenced by their female birth (*strīsvabhāva*); and the role model of the virtuous and self-effacing wife as the only sure path to salvation (*strīdharma*).

This radical distinction between '(essential) woman' and '(ideal) wife' is reflected in the traditional twofold classification of female deities: the 'terrifying' or 'fierce' (*ugrā*) goddesses such as Durgā, Kālī or Cāmūṇḍā; and the 'gentle' or 'pleasing' (*śāntā*, *saumyā*) ones such as Pārvaṭī, Satī, Lakṣmī or Rādhā. It is no surprise that the former group are usually depicted as wild, destructive females associated with rampant appetite and sexuality, and the blood of battlefield, sacrifice and menstruation (cf. Kinsley 1982:146ff.; Bennett 1983:262-72; Carstairs 1973:158-9). In contrast, the latter group consists of ideal goddess-wives whose powers of chastity, fertility and prosperity — derived from their husbands and thus subordinate to them — are in turn the fundamental source or *śakti* of their husbands' powers within the scheme of *dharma* (cf. Dimmitt 1982:210-23; Bennett 1983:272ff.). As one would expect, Pārvaṭī — whom Tryambaka invokes at the beginning and end of this treatise — is one of these.

In the human realm as in the divine, the untamed female nature — with all the negative associations of female sexuality — is antisocial, elemental and dangerous. For Tryambaka, as for *dharmaśāstra* in general, that necessary 'taming' can only be achieved in the controlled state of marriage. As the story of Aṣṭāvakra demonstrates, the alternative path of ascetic renunciation can never fully subdue the essential sexuality of women. For in the imagination of the

orthodox male, 'renunciation' means primarily the renunciation of sexual pleasures and family life, both of which are symbolised by women. Thus while male renunciators may successfully renounce women, female renunciators can never fully renounce themselves. In the inevitable conflict between the sexuality inherent in their nature and the demands of the ascetic life, women renunciators remain essentially 'female', and therefore 'untamed'. The conclusion is obvious: only the pursuit of *strīdharma* can keep this dangerous female nature under control and thus bring the individual to a better birth — perhaps even as a twice-born man (though crossing gender is hard; see section III, pp.246-7) — and, ultimately, to salvation.

II

What then are the main points of this single religious path considered by Tryambaka to be safe for women to pursue?

First, women are forbidden to perform all manner of religious rituals and observances. Thus the six things that cause women to fall into hell include the recitation of sacred texts (*japa*), the performance of austerities (*tapas*), going on pilgrimages, renunciation, the chanting of mantras, and the worship of deities (including temple worship, another striking omission in Tryambaka's treatise). Other rulings add to this list: offerings into the fire (*homa*), religious donations (*dāna*), and any religious 'vow' (*vrata*) or ritual (*makha*; section IV, pp.274-6, notes 7, 8).

Such rulings derive partly from the exclusion of women from Vedic education and the right to independent ritual in general (see sections I, pp.34-9, and IIB, pp.107-8); and partly from the conviction that the most important duty of the orthodox wife is to assist her husband in his religious obligations rather than to pursue any religious commitment of her own (see pp.50, 108-15). Hence the repeated descriptions of the good wife as 'one who shares in her husband's religious duties' (*sahadharma-cārī*, *dharma-cārīṇī*, *dharma-bhāginī*, *pativrata*, *pativratābhāginī*, and so on; e.g. section IV, pp.281-2). Thus she should meditate with her husband on his chosen deity (see section IIA, pp.52-4). She should assist her husband at the fire ritual (see section IIB, pp.107-15, 129-41), at the worship of their household images (see section IIC, pp.178-80), and at the *vaiśvadeva* ritual (see section IIC, pp.180-3). She should prepare the food and serve the guest on her husband's behalf

in the important ceremonies of hospitality (see section IIC, pp.198–205); and so on. Such a view of the religious role of the orthodox wife replaces all independent actions with a variety of obligations arising from her position as ritual assistant to her husband.

Secondly, it is repeatedly stressed that the duties of the wife—whether those of every day (sections IIA–IID) or those occasioned by specific moments in her life (section IV, pp.283–304) are in fact the signs of her religious path, that of devotion to her husband. This devotion is described in two ways: serving and obeying one's husband as one's *guru*; and worshipping him as one's only god. No other description could carry a greater weight of religious commitment and spiritual authority in the Hindu context than these.

The parallel between the orthodox Hindu wife's ministrations to her husband and the Vedic student's attentions to his *guru* is not stressed by Tryambaka. But it emerges piecemeal from his treatise. In section I, for example, Tryambaka explains that the rulings he is about to expound apply only to married women because, for women, 'marriage has taken the place of initiation' (section I, p.35, note 15). He then quotes Manu's famous saying that the marriage ceremony is the female equivalent of initiation, serving one's husband in the home equal to living with and serving one's *guru*, and household duties equivalent to worshipping the sacred fire (section I, p.35 note 16; cf. pp.50, 102, etc.). It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the rulings regarding the wife's services towards her husband (such as attending to his morning toilet, rubbing his body with oil, helping him with his bath, and so on) are strongly reminiscent of the required behaviour of the student towards his teacher (see section IIC, pp.163–8). Touching the husband's feet before a meal (see section IIC, pp.221–2), and before going to bed (see section IID, p.237) recall the respectful salutations the student should offer his *guru* (see section IIC, pp.157–60). Similarly, Tryambaka's insistence that the orthodox wife should eat the remains of her husband's meal evokes another marked parallel with the reverence shown by the student to his teacher (see section IIC, pp.221–7). Finally, in Tryambaka's own conclusion to the treatise, he discusses the full meaning and significance of the term 'service' (*śusrūṣā*) by analogy with the 'service' owed by the student to his teacher: that is, it includes both obeying his commands and administering to his physical

needs, thereby comprising 'every action that gives pleasure, to one's husband-*guru*' (see above, p.312).

In practice, of course, the orthodox wife does not behave like the Vedic student unless her husband is away. For example, the student should not enjoy the pleasures of cleaning his teeth either during his studentship or afterwards whenever he is in the presence of his teacher (see section IIA, pp.80–1). In the case of the wife, however, the prohibition on teeth-cleaning applies only when her husband-*guru* is absent (see section IV, p.291). Similarly, the rules on dress for the married woman bear no comparison with those applicable to Vedic studentship (see section IIA, pp.88–96). In fact, in discussions relating to *āśrama*, women are classed with Vedic students simply because studentship is the least advanced of the four stages of the *samuccaya* system (see section IIA, pp.82–3). Nonetheless, the uplifting analogy, complete with its associations of religious commitment, remains.

The requirement that the orthodox wife should treat her husband as her only god receives somewhat greater stress. For example, the invocation to Pārvaṭī in the opening verses carries with it the powerful image of the wife whose husband really is a god, and whose self-effacing devotions bring her the ultimate reward of becoming half of him (see section I, introductory verse 1). Within the treatise itself, numerous quotations either liken the husband to a god or describe him directly as the wife's only or highest god. Thus, whether he is good or bad, he is the good wife's 'supreme deity' (section IV, p.274, note 2). 'There is no deity like him . . . through his grace all desires are fulfilled' (section IV, p.281, note 21). 'The good woman always regards her husband as a god' (section IV, p.282, note 24). Throughout her married life, her entire appearance, from the *tilaka* on her forehead to the rings on her toes, signal to the world that her husband is her god and that he is alive (see section IIA, p.96–101). When she eats the remains of the meal she has served him, she should receive it reverently as the sanctified *mahāprasāda* of her god (see section IIC, p.221–7). Instead of seeking the blessings of other gods by making pilgrimages or worshipping in temples, she should drink the 'foot water' of her own husband (see section IIB, p.132–41). After his death, she may worship Viṣṇu but only if she keeps the image of her husband in her mind, worshipping him in the guise of the god, bringing him to mind by means of a portrait or a clay model

(see section IV, p.300, notes 67, 68). For the husband is the 'supreme god among all gods', whose law she must fulfil without question (see section V, p.308, note 4).

Thirdly, this replacement of all independent religious activity on the part of the wife with devoted service to her husband-*guru*-god has an important, and perhaps unexpected, consequence. The ideal wife should obey her husband's command even if what he asks her to do is normally considered unlawful (see section V, pp.309-12). For *strīdharmā* supersedes even right and wrong.

Tryambaka's examples in fact reveal a conflict within the notion of *strīdharmā* itself. Having devoted his entire treatise to explaining in detail precisely how the orthodox wife should behave according to the contemporary understanding of *dharmaśāstra* rulings, Tryambaka proceeds to undermine his own creation. All these rulings apply if, and only if, they accord with the individual husband's wishes.

Thus Tryambaka argues against the practice of *niyoga* in section IV (pp.300-2), yet insists that Kuntī should accede to her husband's request that she perform this act simply because he makes it (see section V, pp.309-10). Similarly, the ideal wife should have no contact with men other than her own husband (see section IIC, pp.170-6), let alone make love to them; yet Oghavatī is praised for making love to a brahmin guest when her husband commands her to do so. Indeed, the god Dharma himself declares Oghavatī's chastity restored and her reputation intact due to the power of 'a woman who has truly taken the vow of her husband' (see section V, pp. 310-12).

But this is not as incongruous as it seems. For the classic answer when someone is asked why he is doing something apparently unorthodox is always: 'My god or my *guru* told me to.' Thus Mirābāī flouts the conventions of an orthodox family, caste and society on the grounds of devotion to her lord Kṛṣṇa (cf. Alston 1980). Mahādevī breaks every rule of *strīdharmā*, including the prohibition on nakedness, in her single-minded search for her god (Ramanujan 1979:129). Similarly today, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, frequently reproached by orthodox Hindus for teaching the Vedas to non-Hindus abroad, explains that his *guru* instructed him to do so. The story of Uttanka (alluded to by Tryambaka in section IIC, pp. 210-14), provides an epic example. The conflict of duties described is resolved by Uttanka's decision that his teacher's orders did not

include 'wrong-doing'. The implication is clear: if they had, it would have been right to obey. Through the power of *guruvacana*, the unorthodox becomes orthodox. Since the ideal Hindu wife is required to treat her husband as both *guru* and god, it is hardly surprising that she too may invoke *guruvacana*, or the wishes of her 'god', to justify breaking or bending the traditional rules of *strīdharmā*. For her too, the apparently unorthodox, even forbidden, action becomes both orthodox and right.

III

One last important question needs to be tackled. What bearing does this rather bizarre treatise have on the lives and experiences of actual women in India, whether in the ancient past, the eighteenth century, or today? The question becomes more manageable if we break it down into a number of sub-questions and -answers.

First, what is the relationship between text and social reality in more general terms; that is, between the doctrinal (what they say) and the historical (what was actually the case)? The transmission of religious knowledge in India is essentially an oral tradition. What has been recorded—whether basic text, commentary or digest—is thus already the result of highly selective and to some extent arbitrary process. Yet these recordings are the very texts on which we base our discussions of Indian religion and culture, and the place of women within them. The task is clearly fraught with danger.

In more specific terms, how authoritative or representative are the different kinds of texts on which Tryambaka has drawn? How, for example, do we judge the historicity of the past conjured up by the Vedic hymns? I have attempted to face this question in my commentary whenever Tryambaka has cited Vedic material; for example, when he alludes to the famous Vedic marriage hymn as evidence for the innate purity of women (section III, pp.252-4).

The texts of *dharmaśāstra*, on the other hand, are overtly prescriptive, their pronouncements couched in the characteristic optative mood. From them we learn the duties of men and women according to the orthodox understanding of transcendental law, as represented by that particular compiler or commentator. But how do texts like these relate to social fact?

The work of modern anthropologists is particularly enlightening

in this respect. A.S. Jameson, for example, in her study of the pilgrimage priests (*pāṇḍā*, *gaṅgāguru*) of Hardwar, refers repeatedly to the gap between what her subjects claim they do (i.e. in accordance with orthodox ideals and precepts) and how they in fact behave. Thus they claim to serve only the twice-born; but many in fact have *śūdra*, tribal or even untouchable *jajmāns*. They claim not to recite Vedic mantras for *śūdras* (as Manu specifically prohibits them from doing); yet they are recorded as doing so. They claim not to take donations for ashes; but, as Jameson points out, they could not survive economically if they did not (1976:59,328–52). This gap between textual theory and actual practice is frequently highlighted by anthropological research (e.g. Gombrich 1971). It seems probable that, in both ancient India and eighteenth-century Thanjavur, the strict outlines prescribed by religious ideals were similarly blurred in and by real life.

The relationship between epic literature and social reality is perhaps even more difficult to ascertain. The great Indian epics provide Tryambaka with a profusion of didactic material interlaced with myth and imagination. Are we justified in trying to disentangle sociological evidence from it as well?

Postel-Coster discusses the similar principle of using novels as anthropological material, taking the Indonesian case as her example. She sees the modern novel as a continuation of the myth in traditional societies, but admits that neither novel nor myth draws a picture of social reality in a documentary sense. Literary truth is of a different order: reflections of general ideologies, of the value systems of a particular social class (Postel-Coster 1977:135–50). We should therefore not allow the juxtaposition of mutually exclusive points of view to confuse us unduly. What we have is not so much a conflict of values (although in one sense, of course, we have that too) as a series of different levels of perception: at one end of the scale, statements of the ideal; at the other, all the nuances, variations and shortcomings created when the ideal is carried into daily life. On top of all this, we find the ambivalence inherent in ideals, the positive switching suddenly into its opposite, like a coin flipping over to show the other side.

It is perhaps also worth pointing out that, in India, myth is not so far removed from reality as some outsiders might think. For Indians live their myths. Festivals, ceremonies and dramas are taken straight out of the epics and *purāṇas* and replayed year by year

in villages all over India. In every household, mothers and grandmothers tell and retell these stories to their children until they are embedded in their subconscious minds, emerging to shape their responses to the crises of everyday. Thus when the writer to *Manushi* exclaims that 'we must refuse to be Sitas' (Kishwar and Vanita 1984: 299; see my introduction, p.2), she and those for whom she speaks are resisting not only aspects of Indian culture but, in a very real sense, parts of themselves.

The second sub-question is a more specific restatement of the first. What is the relationship between prescriptive literature written or compiled by a brahmin male elite and the actual experience of women?

Even today, there are orthodox brahmin specialists who — convinced of the rightness of tradition — converse in Sanskrit, pore over the old texts, and take only negative account of other castes and traditions. This distinction between the classical recorded tradition and the largely unrecorded oral traditions is important. An exclusive concern with the former does not rule out the possibility of alternative frameworks for those other segments of society (local gods, tree worship, shamanistic practices, and so on); it merely ignores the problem.

But this religious elite responsible for the texts at our disposal was defined not only by caste and tradition, but also to a very large extent by gender.

In the field of social anthropology, Edwin Ardener's theory of 'muted groups' is now well known (1975; the theory is perhaps best set out in Shirley Ardener's introduction, 1975:vii—xxii). To summarize it briefly, the dominant modes of expression in any society have been generated by the dominant structure. Only the dominant mode is 'heard'. Any subdominant group either learns to express its views in terms of the dominant mode or remains inarticulate, 'muted'. When the polarity is that of gender, the female group is usually the muted one. But, until very recently, most anthropological investigation failed to take this crucial dichotomy into account. At the level of observation in fieldwork (e.g. in terms of marriages, economic activities, rites and so on), the behaviour of women has been exhaustively plotted. But at the second level of the discussion of observed behaviour, there is a real imbalance. Statements about both men and women are made exclusively by men.

This is precisely the position we find in the study of Indian religious texts. Almost the entire religious and ideological edifice constructed in the Sanskrit texts of Hindu orthodoxy has been written or recorded by men. The religious arena is dominated by men; the rules of religious language itself encoded and expounded by them. The religious role allotted to women is defined in terms of their relationship not to God but to men. For women are given what it is considered fitting for them to do; and, as Hirschon points out, there is a close correlation between what it is thought fitting for someone to do and what he or she is considered capable of doing (1978:73).

This is not to assume that women would necessarily have described or prescribed a radically different world view. Indeed, it is highly likely, then as now, that the dominant view was partly or fully internalized by the majority of women. Moreover, we should not be disappointed if this proves to be the case for, as Shirley Ardener points out, it is the small deviations from the norm which may be crucial (1975:xix; cf. Hiebert 1985:98). The traditional male perception of a woman's role must therefore be seen in relation both to what is found in real life and to what can be gathered from listening to women's views. Thus the Wisers describe how the women often laugh 'behind their scarves' at the air of authority assumed by a man; yet 'outwardly they approve, and demand submission from his wife' (1971:79-81). In the Manipur valley, women make 'a formal expression of deference to male authority'; yet 'female defiance of male dominance is a profound feature of their culture' (Chaki-Sirkar 1984: 222). Similarly, Bhuribai claims to be inferior to her husband, on a par with the shoes on his feet; yet she also sees herself as the model of feminine virtue in her own village, virtue incarnate, supporting not only her own husband, family and caste, but the whole of creation as well (Jacobson 1978:134-5).

The chief criterion of a world view, religious or otherwise, is that it is a self-defining system. In a society defined by men, therefore, some features of the corresponding muted group (i.e. women) will not fit that definition. The difference (if any) might lie not in the description but in the evaluation, pointing to positive functions in what the dominant structure sees as negative or inferior. For, on psychological grounds alone, it is hardly likely that half the population of India actually regarded (or regard) themselves in the negative terms outlined by the other half. It is far more probable that they either resisted altogether the interpretations foisted on them (like some of

the contributors of *Manushi*; cf. Kishwar and Vanita 1984); or created their own positive construct (like Bhuribai; cf. Jacobson 1978). For Indian women rarely want to be men; nor, as a general rule, do they seek the 'freedoms' of Western women.

For a coherent understanding of the religious role of Indian women, therefore, we need several approaches at once. First and foremost, the religious texts relating to women must be closely analysed to reveal the implicit structures and unarticulated tensions. It is hoped that this presentation of Tryambakayajvan's *Strīdharmapaddhati* is a useful contribution to this category of research. Secondly, historical and anthropological studies must provide the missing dimension of experiential reality to our growing knowledge of the texts. It is to the latter that we must look for the elusive 'woman's voice' describing and evaluating her own experience. We do not find it in a text such as this.

What we do find is the viewpoint of an eighteenth-century pandit trained in the study of Sanskrit texts, and steeped in both orthodox tradition and the customs and conventions of his own social group. It is clear that his is in some sense a reactionary voice for it calls on his intended audience of high-caste women at the Maratha court of Thanjavur to resist all the changes implied by a Tamil environment, Muslim overlords, and the encroachment of European influence (see my introduction, pp.3-4). It is equally clear that, while he is evidently familiar with the rulings of *dharmaśāstra* and the traditional tales of the epics and *purāṇas*, he is no real *mīmāṃsaka*, no true philosopher. Rather, he is a pillar of the orthodox establishment, sure of his own mind and the rightness of tradition. Commissioned to compile for the high-caste women of his day all the rulings relating to their religious path as orthodox wives, he has produced this bizarre but intriguing document. His views on women, elaborated at great length and in absorbing detail, are fascinating both in themselves and in their relevance to India today. They deserve to form part of the emerging picture of the religious role of Indian women.